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City Attorney Accuses Mayor Of Corruption

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SAN DIEGO -- San Diego's city attorney today called the mayor corrupt and accused him of bailing out a campaign contributor by secretly helping him get approval to put up an unsafe building near Montgomery Field.

Mayor Jerry Sanders scoffed at City Attorney Mike Aguirre's claim that he was helping Sunroad Enterprises erect a building the Federal Aviation Administration believes would be a hazard to airplanes and said being called corrupt by the city attorney is about par for the course.

"Anyone who does not agree with Mr. Aguirre is sometimes accused of being corrupt," he said. "I've had a relationship with him in the past and I'm sure I'll have a relationship with him in the future. I've decided to let it pass."

Sunrise owner Aaron Feldman reportedly contributed \$3,600 to Sanders' campaign, held a fund-raiser for Sanders and also donated \$1 million for the city to buy a firefighting helicopter after the devastating wildfires of a few years ago.

Even so, "nobody should be allowed to break the law," the mayor said. "That's why they have to lower the building 20 feet. The final decision is that we can't change the flight pattern."

Sunroad is building a \$45 million, 12-story office building near the city-owned Montgomery Field Airport in Kearny Mesa.

The city issued a permit for the project, even though it would be 20 feet higher than what the FAA deemed safe for air traffic. The city has since sued Sunroad to stop construction.

Sanders said he supported the lawsuit from the start.

But Aguirre said today that he was tipped off by a federal official that the city entered in a contract to borrow the services of Ted Sexton, chief operations officer for the San Diego Airport Authority, to find a way to change the flight patterns at Montgomery Field so the Sunroad building could remain at the same height.

He cited an agreement between the city and the airport authority that was signed without the city attorney's knowledge and never placed on the City Council agenda.

"The mayor needs to explain exactly what activities occurred and why it happened," Aguirre said. "I will not go along with sweeping the Sunroad deal under the rug."

Aguirre also said Sexton should not be working out of the city's Real Estate Resources Department.

Sanders said Sexton is not working on the Sunroad issue at all, but instead is helping the city determine if the airport authority rather than the city should operate Montgomery and Brown fields, which are now owned by the city. He added that Sexton is working in the real estate division because it oversees the operations of the two airfields.

Sanders said it's common for cities to "borrow" executives from other agencies to work on specific issues.

The agreement was signed April 1. The issue came up publicly at an April 11 City Council committee meeting. Aguirre's deputy was at the meeting and raised no objections, Sanders said.

Aguirre said the issue was only mentioned briefly at the meeting, and was an orchestrated attempt to subtly enter it into the public record without putting it on the agenda for the City Council to discuss it.

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"This is a sophisticated way of sliding something through," he said.

He said the agreement violates the City Charter because he never signed off on it.

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